

Message Text

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ACTION EA-14

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FM AMEMBASSY BANGKOK

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INFO CINCPAC

SECDEF WASHDC

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COMUSMACHTAI BANGKOK

S E C R E T BANGKOK 11938

E.O. 11652: GDS

TAGS: PFOR, PINT, MILI, TH, MOPS, XO, US

SUBJECT: USN INDIAN OCEAN PATROLS FROM UTAPAO

REF: A. BANGKOK 11791; B. STATE 157992

1. WE CONTINUE TO RECEIVE RELIABLE INFORMATION THAT SENIOR MILITARY OFFICIALS ARE CONCERNED ABOUT THE WAY THE RTG DECISION TO STOP USN INDIAN OCEAN PATROLS FROM UTAPAO WAS MADE. AS REPORTED IN REFTTEL A, THE MINISTRY OF FOREIGN AFFAIRS (MFA) ORIGINATED THE PROPOSAL AND COORDINATED IT WITH THE MINISTER OF DEFENSE, THE PRIME MINISTER, AND SUPREME COMMAND DEPUTY CHIEF OF STAFF GEN. KRIANGSAK CHAMANAN. ROYAL THAI ARMY COMMANDER GEN. KRIT SIWARA AND OTHER SERVICE CHIEFS EVIDENTLY WERE NOT CONSULTED IN ADVANCE. NOR WAS THE PROPOSAL DISCUSSED BEFOREHAND IN THE CABINET OR THE NATIONAL SECURITY COUNCIL.

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2. WE ARE RECEIVING INCREASING INDICATIONS THAT SENIOR MILITARY OFFICIALS, ESPECIALLY KRIT, ARE EXTREMELY IRRITATED THAT THEY WERE NOT CONSULTED ON THE DECISION. THEIR ANGER IS DIRECTED NOT ONLY AT THE MFA, BUT ALSO AT OTHER OFFICIALS WHO WERE INVOLVED IN THE DECISION, PRESUMABLY INCLUDING KRIANGSAK. THESE MILITARY OFFICIALS DO NOT ARGUE WITH OR ATTACH GREAT IMPORT TO THE SUBSTANCE OF THE DECISION, BUT ONLY WITH THE WAY IN WHICH IT WAS MADE.

3. CIVILIAN OFFICIALS, ESPECIALLY IN THE MFA, PLACE THE UTMOST IMPORTANCE ON THE DECISION, HOWEVER. THEY SEE IT AS A "DECLARATION OF INDEPENDENCE" FROM THE UNITED STATES, WHICH THEY FEEL HAS DOMINATED POST-WAR THAILAND FOREIGN POLICY. TO THESE OFFICIALS IT IS THE FIRST STEP TOWARD A RE-DEFINED RELATIONSHIP WITH THE U.S. BASED ON A NEW CONCEPT OF THE MUTUALITY OF INTERESTS AND BENEFITS. THEY HAVE APPARENTLY PERSUADED THE PRIME MINISTER THAT SUCH A STEP IF NECESSARY TO ASSUAGE PUBLIC OPINION. SOME MFA OFFICIALS ALSO SEE THE DECISION AS AN IMPORTANT ASSERTION OF MFA PRIMACY IN FOREIGN POLICY MAKING. IT IS THIS LATTER ASPECT THAT HAS BROUGHT THEM INTO CONFLICT WITH THE MILITARY.

4. COMMENT: SHOULD WE PUSH TOO HARD ON THE RTG TO REVERSE ITS DECISION ON P-3 FLIGHTS WE RUN THE RISK OF ENDANGERING OTHER U.S. ACTIVITIES FROM THAILAND IN SUPPORT OF OUR INDIAN OCEAN POLICY. THE LOGIC UPON WHICH P-3 FLIGHTS WERE BANNED WAS: THAT U.S. FORCES WERE ADMITTED TO THAILAND ONLY TO COUNTER AGGRESSION IN INDOCHINA; THAT U.S. INDIAN OCEAN ACTIVITIES FROM THAILAND ARE INCONSISTANT WITH THE RTG ENDORSEMENT OF THE INDIAN OCEAN ZONE OF PEACE; AND THAT STUDENT AND PRESS CRITICISM WILL NOT PERMIT UNRESTRICTED U.S. MILITARY USE OF THAI BASES. IF IT IS CONSIDERED THAT TOO GREAT PRESSURE IS BEING EXERTED BY THE UNITED STATES ON THIS ISSUE, IT IS LIKELY THAT IT WILL BECOME PUBLIC KNOWLEDGE, STUDENTS AND PRESS WILL PROTEST THAT THAI SOVERIEGNTY IS BEING VIOLATED, AND THE RTG WILL DECLARE IT CANNOT FOR DOMESTIC POLITICAL REASONS IGNORE THE PUBLIC OUTCRY. HAVING ALREADY GONE PUBLIC ON THIS QUESTION, THE RTG WOULD HAVE LITTLE OTHER RECOURSE. IN THIS PROCESS WE COULD
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WELL BE SPECIFICALLY DENIED PERMISSION TO CARRY ON U.S. INDIAN OCEAN ACTIVITIES OTHER THAN RECONNAISSANCE FLIGHTS E.G., LOGISTICAL SUPPORT FOR DIEGO GARCIA.

5. THE BACKGROUND OF THE DECISION INDICATES THAT WE MUST TREAD VERY CAREFULLY UNTIL THE DUST HAS SETTLED. IN OUR APPROACHES TO RTG OFFICIALS, WE MUST AVOID BEING CAUGHT IN THE MIDDLE OF AN INTERNAL RTG POWER STRUGGLE.

WE CANNOT AFFORD TO ALIENATE EITHER THE CIVILIAN OR THE MILITARY HIERARCHY, BOTH OF WHICH ARE IMPORTANT TO OUR INTERESTS HERE. WE ARE THEREFORE BEGINNING THE NECESSARILY SLOW PROCESS OF DEMONSTRATING TO THAI OFFICIALS THAT THAILAND'S OWN SECURITY INTERESTS WOULD BENEFIT FROM OUR MONITORING NAVAL ACTIVITIES IN THE INDIAN OCEAN. WE WILL OF COURSE CONTINUE TO SEEK REVERSAL OF THE RTG DECISION IN ACCORDANCE WITH THE DEPARTMENT'S INSTRUCTIONS, AND THE AMBASSADOR HAS ANOTHER APPOINTMENT WITH THE FOREIGN MINISTER ON JULY 25 TO DISCUSS THE MATTER. IN LIGHT OF ALL THE ABOVE CONSIDERATIONS, HOWEVER, WE MUST MOVE CAUTIOUSLY WITH THE REALIZATION THAT WE ARE DEALING WITH AN INTERIM GOVERNMENT. ONLY LATER CAN WE REASSESS POSSIBILITIES FOR A CHANGE OF THE DECISION AFTER ELECTIONS ARE HELD AND A NEW GOVERNMENT TAKES OFFICE.

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